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NEWS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of Communications News Room 460-A

Washington, DC 20250-1300

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World Wide Web Home Page: <http://www.usda.gov>

Release No. 0022.01

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GLICKMAN ANNOUNCES \$24 MILLION CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, Jan. 19, 2001-- Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman today announced a \$24 million partnership with the State of California to enhance water quality and improve wildlife habitat, under the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

"This partnership will help protect California's precious land, wildlife, and water quality while helping many family farmers," said Glickman.

CREP uses federal and state resources to help meet agriculture-related environmental challenges. The California CREP will fund voluntary agreements with farmers to convert cropland to native grasses, trees, and other vegetation. Specifically, this project aims to retire 12,000 acres of highly erodible and environmentally sensitive cropland and create wetlands and protect riparian areas in the North Central Valley. Most of the land likely to be enrolled is marginal agricultural land.

"This new program rewards farmers in the Central Valley who are practicing good environmental stewardship and will help secure the future vitality of the Central Valley's farming and wildlife resources," Governor Gray Davis of California said.

Retiring environmentally sensitive cropland and planting it with wildlife-friendly vegetation will reduce erosion and the amount of pollutants entering surface and ground water supplies. In addition, it will improve air quality and enhance the viability of agriculture through improved soil and water quality. Tree buffers and filter strips planted on the banks of streams and rivers filter runoff water and reduce the risk of pathogens entering public water supplies. They also provide vital habitat for wildlife and improve fish habitat.

USDA will pay up to 75 percent of the estimated \$24 million program costs. The State of California will pay the rest. Many private organizations will provide further assistance. In addition to program costs, USDA also will provide annual rental payments, and cost-share assistance for land enrolled in the project. California will purchase conservation easements, provide cost-share assistance, and provide technical support.

Deputy Agriculture Secretary Richard Rominger, a farmer from Winters, California., signed the agreement on behalf of USDA.

Mary Nichols, Secretary, California Resources Agency and Bill Lyons, Secretary, California Dept. of Food and Agriculture, signed the agreement on behalf of Governor Davis.

Interested farmers can learn about the program by contacting their local Farm Service Agency offices or visiting <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crep.htm> .